

# PALAEARTIC MIGRANTS NEW TO THE NORTH SUDAN

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During autumn ringing programmes in 1980 and 1981 at the Sudan Red Sea coast around Suakin (19°05'N, 37°20'E) and Erkowit (18°45'N, 37°10'E), five species of birds formerly unrecorded from the region were found. The species concerned are the Basra Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus griseldis*, the River Warbler *Locustella fluviatilis*, the Olive-tree Warbler *Hippolais olivetorum*, the Cyprus Warbler *Sylvia melanothorax* and the Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva*. All but the first are new to the North Sudan while the last two are also new to the Afrotropical Region. A fuller account of these two ringing programmes will be published later.

In the accounts which follow all weights are in grams and wing-lengths in millimetres.

## *Acrocephalus griseldis* Basra Reed Warbler

This species has been recorded previously from Juba, South Sudan (Nikolaus 1979) and Kampala, Uganda (Pearson 1972), so it was to be expected that some birds would migrate from their breeding grounds in Iraq along the west side of the Ethiopian highlands through the Sudan. The bulk of the population probably passes through the Ethiopian rift valley, where the bird is common at the end of August and in September (Ash 1978, pers. obs.)

In 1981 two birds were caught and ringed:

2 Sep 1981 in the mangroves south of Suakin (18°50'N, 37°25'E), weight 14, wing 78, primaries unmoulted; adult.

16 Sep 1981 in a green garden in Suakin, weight 15, wing 81; 1st year.

Other examples might have passed through from the middle to the end of August when there were no ornithologists in the area.

## *Locustella fluviatilis* River Warbler

Cave & Macdonald (1955) listed the River Warbler as an 'expected' species while in Uganda there is only one record (Britton 1980). In September 1981 four examples were recorded:

7 Sep 1981 in the mangroves south of Suakin, weight 13.5, wing 77; 1st year.

8 Sep 1981 Erkowit, in Acacia bushes along the Khor Amat (a seasonal river with permanent springs, weight 12, wing 76, primaries worn; adult.

9 Sep 1981 another seen in the same locality at Erkowit, in tamarisk bushes by D.J. Pearson (pers. comm.).

11 Sep 1981 in the mangroves south of Suakin, a very weak individual, weight 11.5, wing 74; 1st year.

Adult birds passing through Ngulia, Kenya in November and December have a number of the outer primaries renewed, and this must be done somewhere between the Red Sea coast and southeastern Kenya (Pearson & Backhurst 1976).

## *Hippolais olivetorum* Olive-tree Warbler

Cave & Macdonald (1955) and Moreau (1972) predicted that this species would be recorded in the Sudan, since it breeds from Yugoslavia east to Asia Minor and winters south of the Sudan. It is not reported from Uganda while in Kenya it is restricted to the eastern part of the country on passage from late September to mid December (Britton 1980). Urban & Brown (1971) record it as 'rare' from Eritrea and northeast Ethiopia. Jennings (1981) gives one sight record from southern Arabia on the Red Sea while Etchécopar & Hüe (1967) note two birds from Egypt, although Watson (1973) did not record it from Egypt nor did Bundy (1976) from Libya.

There are now seven early autumn records for the Sudan, four of which are

specimens, hitherto wrongly identified as Orphean Warblers *Sylvia hortensis*, in the Khartoum Museum:

- 3 Aug 1981 2 seen in the Sunt Forest (*Acacia*), Khartoum by D.J. Pearson (pers. comm.).
- 5 Aug 1981 1 seen by the author and D.J. Pearson in low coastal scrub near the mangroves south of Suakin during a big fall of other Palae-artic migrants
- 10 Jly 1924 Specimen No. 2787, juvenile female, Atbara (17°41'N, 34°00'E), wing 84.
- 28 Jly 1947 Specimen No. 6192, male, Wad Medani (14°24'N, 33°32'E), wing 85.
- 30 Aug 1942 Specimen No. 5294, male, as above, wing 84.
- 17 Sep 1941 Specimen No. 5143, male, as above, wing 87.

All these records support the idea that the Olive-tree Warbler enters Africa through the North Sudan and Eritrea. After a stop-over in the *Acacia* bushland around Kassala, Gedaref and Wad Medani the birds presumably pass along the west side of the Ethiopian escarpment and through eastern Kenya. The bird from Atbara in July might even indicate rare breeding in the Sudan.

#### *Ficedula parva* Red-breasted Flycatcher

This species migrates from Europe to wintering grounds in India and Pakistan. During this NW-SE migration birds pass regularly through northeast Africa and Saudi Arabia (Bundy 1976, Jennings 1981). It is not surprising therefore that this bird should have now been found at the Red Sea Coast on passage. A single example was grounded and caught at night during mist using strong lights (see Pearson & Backhurst 1976, Nikolaus 1980) on the escarpment at Erkowit at 1000 m on 2 November 1980. This fact now suggests the possibility that the Red-breasted Flycatcher may overfly NE Africa regularly on passage. Since this was the first definite record (see below) for the Afrotropical Region, the bird was collected and is now in the Stuttgart Museum, West Germany. The data are: female, weight 7.5, wing 68.

Sclater & Mackworth-Praed, in their list (1918) mention one sight record for Bhar-el-Ghazal, South Sudan. Even though the species' occurrence there is very unlikely (and has never been mentioned subsequently), it is possible that it was a vagrant. Further, Moreau (1972) speculates that a few Red-breasted Flycatchers might cross the Sahara to winter in west Africa.

#### *Sylvia melanothorax* Cyprus Warbler

The Cyprus Warbler is resident on the island of Cyprus and has been reported exceptionally in winter from Lebanon and Israel; there is also a rejected record of a male said to have been collected in February 1945 in western Saudi Arabia (Jennings 1981).

In the late autumn of 1980 there were three records of this bird at the Red Sea hills where it seemed to winter alongside Ménétries' Warbler *Sylvia mystacea*, feeding together with them in low *Acacia* bushes. The Cyprus Warblers were easily separated by their heavily spotted breast. They were very tame and passed only a few metres away. One bird was collected and is now in the Stuttgart Museum.

- 17 Nov 1980 1st year female, weight 9, wing 57 collected at Erkowit.
- 17/18 Nov 1980 at least one more bird seen in the same bushes after the first bird had been collected
- 22 Nov 1980 an adult female seen at the foothills of Erkowit. It was similar to the other two examples but had black ear-coverts, a light breast with large black spots, the cap was greyish like the back and the legs were reddish brown.

In addition to the five species dealt with above, three others are worth mentioning.

### *Porzana pusilla* Baillon's Crane

There exist two old records of this species for the Sudan, but the bird is not mentioned by Cave & Macdonald (1955). One is still mounted in the Khartoum Museum (Bowen, No. 16, April 1921, male collected at Berber, 18°05'N, 34°00'E). The second bird was caught by Madden in his house on 26 September 1925 (Madden 1930). Without comparative material I am unable to determine the subspecies, but it seems likely that both are Palaearctic birds (nominate race) rather than of the poorly differentiated Afrotropical *intermedia*.

### *Phoenicurus erythrogaster* Güldenstädt's Redstart

This is not a definite record because, when I saw it at the Red Sea hills in the 1980 autumn, I was not able to identify it properly. Since there is a great possibility that it was *P. erythrogaster*, I think it is worth recording.

In the late evening of 8 and 9 October and then again of 2 and 3 November 1980, I saw, at two different places on the Erkowit escarpment, a large redstart with a dark head with a dirty whitish crown, a large white wing speculum and a reddish brown belly. The bird was very adept at hiding behind cliffs and bushes, so that nearly always only the white speculum on a dark bird with a reddish belly and rump could be seen. Both birds always stayed in their same territory. These records get some support from a recent field sighting in northern Saudi Arabia (M.C. Jennings, *in litt.*).

Güldenstädt's Redstart is a resident of the mountains west and south of the Caspian Sea (Dement'ev 1968). Up to now only altitudinal movements in autumn and spring have been reported.

### *Sylvia nana nana* Desert Warbler

This bird is well known to winter in the northern part of the Sudan. In late autumn 1980 two examples were caught and ringed in the mangroves south of Suakin (19 and 29 October with weights 7.5 and 7 and wings 57 and 56); another was seen at Suakin on 9 November and a fourth individual in the Erkowit foothills on 11 November. All four were identified as nominate race even though they looked like two different species. The two November birds fitted well with the published descriptions (Williamson 1968, Cave & Macdonald 1955, Mackworth-Praed & Grant 1960, Svensson 1975); they were probably winter visitors from Iran or east of the Caspian Sea.

The two October birds were caught soon after arrival from across the Red Sea, in mangroves; however, the upper tail-coverts and the tail itself were bright rufous; the central tail feathers had dark shafts, there was white on the outermost tail feathers and the other outer tail feathers were tipped with white giving the tail a *Cisticola*- or Rufous Bush Chat-like appearance. This fits with the description given for the nominate race by Dement'ev (1968). Similar birds have also been described by Kitson (1979) from Mongolia. Antony Pettet (pers. comm.) also observed birds with rufous rump and tail at Suakin in early autumn and remarked that they were different from the 'normal' *nana* he knows as a regular winter visitor around Khartoum.

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